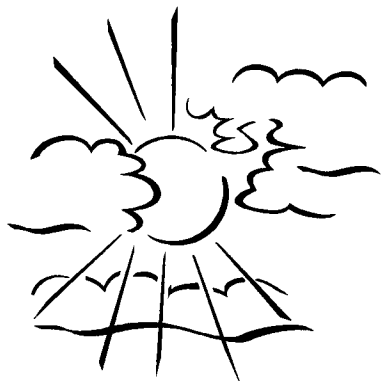


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
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Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, May 25, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Published May 25, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Senate passes budget without welfare limits

Tough sanctions remain for those abusing system

By David Eggert
Associated Press

A state House plan to set a four-year lifetime limit on cash assistance for Michigan welfare recipients was not included in a budget measure approved Wednesday by the Senate.

The Republican-controlled Senate voted 38-0 to pass a spending plan that imposes stiffer sanctions on recipients who don't fulfill working or training requirements, but it doesn't address whether they should be kicked off welfare after four years.

That contrasts with the GOP-led House, which was expected to approve more sweeping welfare changes - limiting benefits for able-bodied adults to two consecutive years and four years over their lifetime.

Sen. Bill Hardiman, a Kentwood Republican who helped write the Department of Human Services budget, said the significant welfare changes proposed by House Republicans should be addressed in regular legislation outside the budget process.

Some Democrats have criticized the sanctions and limits as too tough.

The House and Senate will each pass their own versions of a budget plan for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. Differences will have to be ironed out between the two chambers.

So far, differences between the chambers include how much the state gives local governments for police, fire and other services in revenue sharing payments. Another difference is whether

to create a school to train a new group of Michigan State Police troopers.

The Senate voted Wednesday to keep revenue sharing payments to local governments about the same as the current year, as proposed by Granholm. The House wants to provide an overall increase.

The Senate also approved a Michigan State Police budget that does not include money to train a new group of troopers. The House wants to designate \$2.5 million for a trooper school because there are about 250 fewer troopers than in 2000.

Sen. Cameron Brown, a Sturgis Republican who helped write the state police budget, agreed the state needs more troopers but said it does not have the money to train them, adding that the department already may be facing a structural deficit.

The Senate passed spending plans for K-12 schools, universities and prisons in March.

Also Wednesday, the House approved a spending plan for K-12 public schools. It would provide at least \$230 more per student for next fiscal year, raising the minimum foundation allowance to \$7,105 - more than that proposed by the Senate or Gov. Granholm. It also would give lower-funded districts an additional \$35 per student and add more money for middle school math programs.

The House school aid bill passed by a 90-15 vote, with many Democrats joining the Republican majority to support it.

Associated Press writer Tim Martin contributed to this report.

BUDGETS WIN UNANIMOUS SENATE OK; **WELFARE CHANGES OMITTED**

The Senate has finished all its initial work on the 2006-07 budget, and in almost unprecedented manner: all 10 bills passed unanimously. Notably and in stark contrast to the House, the Senate's version of the Department of Human Services budget does not include the significant changes to welfare policies that House members have approved.

And even other budgets that faced opposition in the Senate Appropriations Committee passed unanimously. Traditionally at least one Senate member has opposed at least some of the budgets, but there was no one taking that role this day.

HUMAN SERVICES (SB 1090■): While the House has enacted major changes to Michigan's welfare system, the Senate took no such steps as it passed the budget on a 38-0 vote.

In fact, no one in the Senate even suggested the chamber consider the proposed changes to welfare policy the House has enacted as it approved the \$4.471 billion, \$1.2 billion in general funds for the Department of Human Services. The total budget would be about 1 percent larger than the current year.

Subcommittee chair Sen. Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood) has said that any changes in welfare policies should be addressed in regular legislation rather than in the budget.

As he did on Tuesday, Mr. Hardiman said where Ms. Granholm called for an additional 51 child protective services workers – an issue that came into sharper focus earlier this year with the murder of Ricky Holland, allegedly by his foster parents – the subcommittee has called for 56 more child protective services workers. The budget will also add another 20 workers to inspect child and adult care centers.

Sen. Deborah Cherry (D-Burton) once again made an effort, which was once again unsuccessful, to look at setting up childcare systems that cover day care in afternoons and evenings. A number of people trying to get off welfare have to take jobs during second and third shifts, she said, but if care is not available for their children that will make it difficult for them to take those jobs.

HISTORY, ARTS & LIBRARIES (SB 1089■): Again, the budget drew the most fire of all the budget measures up for consideration, but somewhat surprisingly the measure passed 38-0 as did all the other budgets.

And again the issue was full funding for the state's arts and library grants. The budget cuts \$384,000 from those provisions from the current year's funding, while Governor Jennifer Granholm had called for an increase of \$600,000 and the House had called for an increase of \$530,000.

The budget totals \$53.9 million, \$42.2 million in general funds. The budget is less than 1.5 percent larger than the current year.

On Tuesday, Sen. Tom George (R-Portage) said the subcommittee had to make cuts to the arts and libraries grants because the administration did not fund fully fund the Michigan Film Office and the Mackinac Island State Park with general funds.

But Wednesday Sen. Hansen Clarke (D-Detroit) tried unsuccessfully once again to restore the funding for arts grants and the libraries to the level Ms. Granholm had proposed. The state's 21st Century Jobs Fund would allow for funding the film office without using general funds, he said.

And cutting funds to the libraries will hurt residents all across the state, Mr. Clarke said.

TRANSPORTATION (SB 1097■): The state could spend no more money on the Detroit River International Crossing study under the budget, passed on a 38-0 vote.

The budget for 2006-07 totals 43.343 billion, none of it in general funds. The budget is a 1.3 percent increase over the current year.

The amendment adopted on the floor to end funding for the crossing study had no money attached to it, but Sen. Jud Gilbert (R-Algonac) said there was no point to spending state funds on a proposal for either a new bridge or tunnel to carry traffic, especially commercial traffic, across the Detroit River.

After several joint hearings on the crossing project with the House Transportation Committee, Mr. Gilbert, chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, said more questions were raised about the project than were answered.

Some \$180 million has been spent on public funds on the gateway project by the Ambassador Bridge, Mr. Gilbert said, but whether a second span will be built for the bridge and who will finance it are open to question, especially since the Canadian government has withdrawn support for the project going directly into Windsor.

But Sen. Ray Basham (D-Taylor) said the DRIC project has actually brought "some sunshine into the process" and should be continued.

In another amendment, Mr. Basham unsuccessfully tried to convince the chamber to cut funding to the Detroit Port Authority, which he said may be duplicating the functions of the Michigan Economic Development Authority. But Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) said he had gotten no indication the authority was not performing its functions.

Efforts to restore \$10 million to the Comprehensive Transportation Fund, which would put it up to the level recommended by Governor Jennifer Granholm, failed. Even with that, the CTF is still increased by \$11 million over the current year.

STATE POLICE (SB 1096■): State Police would be allocated \$566.8 million, \$255.3 million in general funds. The budget is slightly less than 3 percent larger than the current year's appropriation. The chamber passed the budget on a 38-0 vote.

Adopted was an amendment directing that any unexpended funds, after retirement needs are paid for, go towards a new trooper school. The budget anticipates the state will have 1,052 troopers, which Sen. Cameron Brown (R-Sturgis) said would be a new low for the state.

While Mr. Brown supported the amendment, he also said it was possible the department could face a budget shortfall in the current year of as much as \$7 million because traffic fine collections have not come in as expected.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT (SB 1087■): The budget that allocates funds for the Legislature, the governor and seven departments – Attorney General, Civil Rights, Civil Service, Information Technology, Management and Budget, State and Treasury – would total \$3 billion, \$644.6 million in general funds and \$591.4 million in interdepartmental transfers.

The Attorney General totals \$68.1 million, \$32.5 million in general funds, just over a 5.2 percent increase from the current year.

Civil Rights would be allocated \$13.9 million, \$12.3 million in general funds, a 5.3 percent increase over the current year.

Civil Service would be allocated \$36.5 million, \$6.9 million in general funds, a roughly 1.4 percent total increase.

The Executive Office would be allocated \$5.5 million, all in general funds, approximately 1.7 percent more than the current year.

Information Technology would be allocated \$380.6 million, all through interdepartmental grants and transfers. The budget is nearly 9 percent larger than the current year.

The Legislature would be allocated \$131.6 million, \$126.8 million in general funds, a 1.4 percent increase over the current year.

Management and Budget would receive \$496.9 million, \$100.3 million in general funds, a better than 100 percent increase but that is due to moving the State Building Authority rent payments from Treasury to DMB. That total alone is \$272.8 million.

State would be allocated \$198.5 million, \$18.9 million in general funds, only about a .5 percent increase over the current year.

Treasury would be allocated \$1.681 billion – \$1.4 billion of that in revenue sharing payments – with \$167.7 million in general funds. The budget is better that 10 percent smaller than the current year allocation, but that is largely because of the transfer of rent payments.

MILITARY AFFAIRS (SB 1093■): The budget for the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs would total \$122.9 million, \$40.6 million in general funds. The total budget is a little more than 4 percent larger than the current year. The budget was approved on a 38-0.

JUDICIARY (SB 1091): The budget for the state's courts would total \$257.3 million, with \$158 million in general funds. The total budget is about .7 percent larger than the current year and was approved on a 38-0 vote.

The budget allows for four additional judges in the upcoming year, said Sen. Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt), and the state is urging local courts to step up their efforts to collect judgments assessed against defendants. Local courts have not always been vigilant in collecting those judgments, and half the funds go for victim restitution and the rest to programs like the state's libraries.

AGRICULTURE (SB 1080): An effort to add some port inspectors to the budget failed as the Senate approved the \$113.1 million, \$30.4 million in general funds, measure on a 38-0 vote. The budget is a 3 percent decline from the current year.

Sen. Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor) urged the addition of inspectors at Michigan's ports, saying if the state had had those inspectors in earlier years, it might have been able to stop the introduction of the Emerald Ash Borer. If the insect had been stopped, then neighborhoods across the state would not be "denuded" by the loss of millions of trees.

Mr. Brown agreed that inspectors would be helpful, but said the state did not have the funds to pay for them. In fact, he said, while the budget was able to add money for fruit and vegetable inspectors, the state faces a shortfall in funding for dairy inspections.

D.L.E.G. (SB 1092): The budget for the Department of Labor and Economic Growth would total \$1.217 billion, \$48.8 million in general funds, about a .2 percent increase.

The budget does not contemplate an increase in liquor license fees, as Ms. Granholm had proposed.

The budget also adds \$1.3 million to cover costs for the newly approved fire safety authority that was created in the department.

D.N.R. (SB 1094): The budget totals \$290.1 million, \$24.8 million in general fund. Passed 38-0 as were all the other budgets, a better than 5 percent increase over the current year.

The budget includes an estimated \$3.5 million in additional revenue due to an increase in camping fees, because of that the budget adds funds for state parks. The budget also adds \$1 million in private funds from the Kellogg Foundation to improve access for disabled persons at state parks.

Senate Spends Day Passing Spending Plans

MIRS, Wednesday, May 24, 2006

The Senate spent much of the day passing some 10 Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget bills that were pushed through the full Senate Appropriations Committee on Tuesday (See "[Johnson Gets Standing O In Approps Finale](#)," 05/23/06).

The budgets passed today included the departments of Natural Resources; Agriculture; Transportation; Human Services; Labor and Economic Growth; State Police; Military and Veterans Affairs; and History, Arts and Libraries.

In addition, the upper chamber also reported funding plans for the state's judiciary and the sprawling general government budget that funds numerous state departments, the Legislature and the executive office. Ultimately, all the budget bills passed without opposition.

The plan on both the part of the House and Senate is to place budget bills into conference committees prior to the Memorial Day break. After the holiday, legislative leaders will likely begin scheduling target meetings with the administration.

Once those targets are set, work between House and Senate conferees on final spending plans for the fiscal year can begin, something lawmakers are hoping happens sooner rather than later so they can get back to their districts to campaign.

Throughout the day, Senate Appropriations Committee Democrats tried to attach amendments they pursued in committee Tuesday and earlier in the month in subcommittee without success. The Democratic caucus opted to not give the budget bills immediate effect today in order to "keep their options open" for when the bills come out of conference committee.

The following are key changes that were adopted during today's Senate session.

Transportation — No State Money For DRIC

The major change made to [SB 1097](#), the FY 2007 Transportation budget, was an amendment by Sen. Jud [GILBERT](#) (R-Algonac) that bars any state transportation funds from being used to support the ongoing Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC) study.

The rub on the DRIC is that Windsor, Canada, indicated it didn't want a twin span to the Ambassador Bridge. The current private owner of the Ambassador Bridge has hired a lobbyist to promote that option over a publicly held border crossing (See "[Perricone; This Doesn't Pass The Smell Test](#)," 05/18/06).

Complicating the debate over the Ambassador is an apparent preference by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security not to have the second crossing right next to the first, where both could be vulnerable to a terrorist attack.

In addition, the privately owned Windsor Tunnel has proposed creating a second tunnel as a possible solution.

Sen. Ray [BASHAM](#) (D-Taylor) urged his colleagues to consider the nature of the crossing before removing state funding authority.

"When you build a bridge across an international border, both sides have to agree. I think the DRIC study will [also] eliminate possible court suits," Basham said. "I would urge members to think about this substitute to eliminate the DRIC study."

For more information about the Senate version of the 2007 Transportation budget, see "[Transportation Budget Races Through Subcommittee](#)," 05/16/06.

Department of Natural Resources

The only change made today by the full Senate to [SB 1094](#), the Department of Natural Resources budget, was an amendment offered by Sen. Jason **ALLEN** (R-Traverse City) to provide some \$400,000 for the Army Corps of Engineers to repair a damaged break wall in Petoskey.

The Senate version of the budget comes in roughly \$3.2 million gross over, and \$327,000 General Fund under the governor's budget recommendation (See "[Clarke Lobbies For \\$5B Bonding Cap](#)," 05/17/06).

State Police

Sen. Hansen **CLARKE** (D-Detroit) succeeded today on the floor in what he was unable to do in Senate Appropriations on Tuesday — add language to [SB 1096](#) directing any balance from the current fiscal year's State Police budget toward a new trooper school.

Currently, the state has some state troopers. That level of trooper strength is being described as being at an all-time low. The Clarke amendment was narrowly adopted (See "[CREC Spares State Police, Veterans' Budgets](#)," 05/18/06).

General Government- Money Added For Growing Communities

A number of local governments will split some \$46,900 that Sen. Deb **CHERRY** (D-Burton) succeeded in inserting into [SB 1087](#), the state's general government budget.

The amendment basically ensures communities that conducted a mid-decade census that showed larger populations than recorded in the 2000 Census will get the state revenue sharing dollars they're properly owed (See "[Senate Cuts 1.3% From General Government Budget](#)," 05/16/06).

DHS - Wayne Count Gets \$2 Million Fed Funds

Wayne County will see some \$2 million in federal Family Preservation funding, according to an amendment to [SB 1090](#), which is the Department of Human Services budget. The amendment was offered up by Sen. Laura **TOY** (R-Livonia).

The Toy amendment, which was identical to one offered by Sen. Martha G. **SCOTT** (D-Detroit) but rejected in Tuesday's full Appropriations Committee, redirects the funds to be used for the county's programs to serve delinquent youth.

The key issue over [SB 1090](#) going into targets and conference work will likely be the 48-month-limit for welfare recipients. The Senate removed it, and the House included it (See "[48 Month Limit Removed from DHS Budget](#)," 05/18/06).

Sen. Bill **HARDIMAN** (R-Grand Rapids), subcommittee chair on the Department of Human

Services, said today he believes a 48-month limit should be pursued through statute.

House Passes Budget Sans Tough Votes

MIRS, Wednesday, May 24, 2006

It's amazing what some procedural calisthenics, a little misdirection and a lot of grit will get you.

In the case of House Republicans tonight, it was shoving through the full chamber a Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget, 60-46, without the House Democrats tagging one Republican member with a bad vote on an amendment. Rather, the budget was packed with plenty of new goodies for several of the GOP Caucus' politically vulnerable members.

The Republicans used a procedural trick to slide the contents of the massive multi-departmental "omnibus" bill onto the tail end of HB 5796, which had been known as the "School Bus" bill, the FY 2007 spending plan for Higher Education, Community Colleges and the Department of Education.

The Democrats had all of their budget amendments cued up for the abandoned omnibus, HB 5795, meaning several of their amendments were never taken up. Instead the Republicans latched the contents of the omnibus onto the backend of the School Bus and then proceeded to gavel through some 50 GOP-sponsored amendments.

"I believe this is an abuse of power," said House Minority Leader Dianne **BYRUM** (D-Onondaga). "What you see today is childish, irresponsible antics and it's saying that the status quo is not working and we need change. This borders on being absolutely ludicrous.

"Look at this. You have more order in a kindergarten classroom," she added, pointing to gleefully celebrating Republicans. "This shows that the status quo is not working in Lansing."

But House Speaker Craig **DeROCHE** (R-Nov) said the Democrats brought tonight's process on themselves by extending their political operation to the House floor over the past several months when they consistently tried to force votes on the Democratic caucus' bread-and-butter issues — drug immunity and Canadian trash.

That attempt to pin House Republicans with votes against populist measures extended to today's budget bill, where the Democrats tried to generate voting-board proof to back up their contention that Republicans are balancing the state's budget on the backs of the poor and the city of Detroit.

"There weren't any political games outside of what the minority leader was trying to do," DeRoche said.

In the end, the House passed one super-sized budget bill, HB 5796, which contained the spending plan for every state budget outside of the School Aid Fund (SAF), which legally needs to be its own separate bill. Rep. Gary **McDOWELL** (D-Rudyard) and Rep. John **ESPINOZA** (D-Croswell), the Democrats' most politically vulnerable members, ended up joining the Republicans' 58 members in supporting the bill.

The Republican majority praised the budget as a plan that increased spending for education, local units of government and more state troopers without raising taxes. The Republicans were able to do it by spending less money in the Department of Community Health (DCH) and enacting welfare reforms that cut healthy adults off public assistance after four years.

Under the new omnibus, physicians would receive a four percent increase in their Medicaid reimbursement payments as an incentive for them to see more Medicaid patients. The House leadership had originally suggested a five percent increase for physicians (See "House DCH Budget Hikes Co-Pays, Doctor Money," 5/3/06).

Otherwise, the some 50 amendments that were tacked onto the spending plan were either overtly political, technical or pork for particular Republican members.

An amendment that banned the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) from drawing up ergonomics standards for Michigan businesses was passed with some of the only debate held on amendments to HB 5796.

Rep. Andy **MEISNER** (D-Ferndale) argued that data shows that ergonomics standards increase productivity, promote the need for more job training money and create more loyalty among employees.

"Which businesses don't want more profits? Which business doesn't want employees who show up for work every day?" Meisner asked.

Rep. Rick **JONES** (R-Grand Ledge) said state ergonomic standards are an unnecessary requirement to put on businesses and that only one state — California — has adopted these types of standards.

Some of the other political-bent amendments added to the budget include:

- a Rep. Mike **NOFS** (R-Battle Creek) addition that tacks on a 35 percent surcharge on state prisoner toiletry purchases with the money raised going to pay for a new trooper school.

- a Rep. Leslie **MORTIMER** (R-Horton) addition bans the Department of Education from discouraging the use of the word "American" in referring to a citizen of the United States. The amendment comes after a former state School Board member wrote a letter to the *Detroit News* claiming that the department was going to use the new school curriculum law to eliminate the "American" adjective in describing U.S. citizens (See related story).

- a Rep. Phil **LaJOY** (R-Canton) amendment reads that the Legislature must approve any state money being spent on a proposed crossing over the Detroit River between Detroit and Ontario after some legislators expressed concern about the direction of the new crossing.

- a Rep. Chris **WARD** (R-Brighton) amendment requires the Department of Human Services to obtain proof from all Medicaid recipients that they are legal U.S. citizens or in the country legally before they can get Medicaid. If the Department catches someone who is not in the United States legally, the state employee needs to call the police so border officials can deport them.

- a Rep. Dan **ACCIAVATTI** (Chesterfield Twp.) amendment requires the Department of Treasury to come up with a detailed study on how much money it actually costs them to collect motor fuel taxes for the Department of Transportation.

- a Rep. Darwin **BOOHER** (R-Evart) amendment requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to accept any donations over \$950,000 from individuals who want to donate to a trail as long as the trail is renamed in their honor. This comes in response to the DNR turning down a \$1 million gift from the Meijer family (See "Administration Backing Trail Policy," 5/17/06) for the White Pine Trail.

- a Rep. John **PASTOR** (Livonia) amendment bans community colleges and state universities from entering into "project labor agreements," where the school writes a building proposal in such a way that only unionized workers could compete for the jobs (See "Pastor Goes After PLAs," 5/18/06).

- Pastor also sliced out the mandate that the Wayne County/Detroit Mental Health Board would lose \$50 million from the state if it didn't become an authority.

Some of the servings of the hometown pork included:

- Rep. Tom **CASPERSON** (R-Escanaba) cashing in on a two-fer. He got an extra \$200,000 for Bay de Noc Community College and \$1 million for Northern Michigan University to "aid the university" in the transition to the House's state university funding model. Northern was receiving a tiny increase in the House budget while 13 of the 15 state universities fared much better (See "Most U's Win, Familiar Two").

Lose In House Proposal," 4/26/06).

- Rep. Tim **MOORE** (R-Farwell) scored another \$200,000 for Mid Michigan Community College.
- Rep. David **LAW** (R-Commerce Twp.) had \$990,000 set aside for the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and \$800,000 for a multi-cultural heritage center.
- Rep. Jack **BRANDENBURG** (R-Harrison Twp.) included \$500,000 for the city of St. Clair Shores for work on their canals.
- Rep. David **FARHAT** (R-Muskegon) got \$200,000 to pay for the development of a wetlands at the Muskegon County wastewater treatment facility along Little Black Creek.
- Rep. Gary **NEWELL** (R-Saranac) got \$75,000 set aside for the Barry County domestic violence program.
- Rep. Jack **HOOGENDYK** (R-Kalamazoo) put \$1 million of tobacco securitization money into an early drug discovery program that's being run through Kalamazoo Valley Community College.
- Rep. David **PALSROK** (R-Manistee) guided \$975,000 from the agricultural development fund for the Cherry Marketing Institute to be used for the promotion of the health benefits of tart cherries by the Cherry Industry Administrative Board.
- Rep. Chris **WARD** (R-Brighton) wanted \$500,000 for dispute resolution at the Island Lake shooting range and a transportation study for Washtenaw and Livingston counties.
- Rep. Rick **BAXTER** (R-Hanover) got a \$500,000 grant for Cascades Park in Jackson and \$500,000 for signs that would help drivers get to the Michigan International Speedway.
- Mortimer also pushed for the Department of Transportation to spend at least \$32,000 for a safe-routes-to-schools project in Eaton Rapids. She also sponsored an amendment that would spend \$15 million to widen U.S. 127 south of Jackson.

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Teachers accused of ignoring sex abuse

Jennifer Chambers / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- *After being sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend, the 12-year-old girl did the right thing: She told two teachers.*

But authorities say those teachers at Pontiac's Madison Middle School failed the girl -- and broke the law -- when they did not report the child's claims to state welfare officials. Instead, one of the teachers called the girl's mother in to school, told her about the abuse, and then sent the girl back home, where she was repeatedly raped over the next nine months.

On Wednesday, police obtained a warrant accusing teachers Lisa Powe and Carol Fleming with knowingly failing to report suspected child abuse or neglect, a 93-day misdemeanor.

Neither could be reached for comment.

Prosecutors said the situation happens too frequently. While Michigan educators were responsible for reporting 2,557 investigated complaints of child abuse or neglect last year, authorities say many teachers refuse to follow the law, saying they don't want to get involved in lengthy criminal cases or are unsure of whether the complaint is legitimate.

"What happened here created a risk of harm for the child. She did everything right and they let her down," said Oakland County chief deputy prosecutor Deborah Carley.

The mother's boyfriend, Dwight T. Buley, has been convicted of three counts of criminal sexual conduct in the first degree, a charge that includes penetration. Prosecutors expect a lengthy prison sentence when he goes before Oakland Circuit Judge Steven Andrews on June 13.

Moreover, a neglect petition has been filed against the girl's mother, seeking to have the child removed from her custody. Carley said when the mother was questioned in the criminal case, she told investigators she had put a lock on her daughter's door to solve the problem.

"This is exactly what this law was enacted for," Carley said. "We cannot rely on parents to protect their own children. This child was not protected."

According to Carley, the case unfolded this way:

In May 2005, the girl came to school and told Powe, a permanent substitute teacher at Madison, that her mother's boyfriend was inappropriately touching her and her mother did not know about it.

Powe alerted her supervisor, Fleming, who was head of special education at the school, about the abuse -- a move prosecutors said was her first mistake because the law requires an immediate report to the state.

The girl, who has a learning disability, then told Fleming of the abuse, according to Carley, who added that Powe expected Fleming to take care of it despite the reporting requirement. But rather than report to the state, Fleming contacted the victim's mother and they met. The mother said she was unaware of the problem and would take care of it.

Fleming also should have reported the case to the state Department of Human Services, Carley said. Instead, the teachers did nothing, and the child went home for the summer, Carley said.

At the beginning of a new school year in September, Fleming asked the girl if she was OK. The child said yes, Carley said, because that is what her mother told her to say.

Finally in December, the girl told a friend about the sexual abuse. The friend's father encouraged the girl to report the abuse to a teacher. The victim went back to school and again told Powe and Fleming and two additional teachers about the abuse. One of the new teachers reported the case to the state.

At trial, assistant prosecutor Elisa Ramunno called both teachers as witnesses in the case. Powe refused to testify. Fleming did testify for prosecutors, admitting that she failed to report the abuse to state authorities, saying she thought the girl's mother was going to take care of the matter, Ramunno said.

Pontiac Schools Superintendent Mildred Mason said her district provides training every year to its staff on mandatory reporting laws.

"We expect them to do it," Mason said Wednesday.

Both teachers were reprimanded, Mason said, but she refused to say how or whether both women were still teaching at the school.

Maureen Sorbet, spokeswoman for the Department of Human Services, said a large percentage of cases of suspected child abuse and neglect come from teachers in addition to police officers and hospital or clinical social workers.

"Teachers are an extremely important source of information on the possible abuse or neglect of a child," Sorbet said.

She did not have figures on how many educators have been charged with failing to report.

Carley says the mandatory reporting law is clear -- teachers along with police officers, doctors, social workers and others -- are required to immediately and directly contact the state Department of Human Services upon suspecting child abuse or neglect.

The person reporting the matter is not expected to know the definitions of child abuse or neglect used in legal proceedings or even know the name of the perpetrator, the law says.

Yet failing to report these cases has become such a problem in recent years that the Oakland County prosecutor's office recently formed a committee with school officials and CARE House to create a guidebook for all mandatory reporters to follow.

In 2001, Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca sent a letter to every school district in Oakland County reminding educators of their obligation and that they can be criminally charged if they fail to follow the law.

You can reach Jennifer Chambers at (248) 647-7402 or jchambers@detnews.com.

Who must report abuse

Michigan law requires that these officials immediately contact the state Department of Human Services upon suspecting child abuse or neglect:

Physicians, dentists, physician's assistants, registered dental hygienists, medical examiners, nurses, licensed emergency medical care providers, audiologists, psychologists, marriage and family therapists, licensed professional counselors, certified

social workers, social workers, school administrators and counselors, teachers, law enforcement officers, clergy, regulated child care providers.

Boy Lost At Day-Care Center

Police Are Investigating

POSTED: 3:44 pm EDT May 24, 2006

A local mother said her 2-year-old son was lost at a day-care center on Wednesday. The boy's mother told Local 4 that her mother went to the Winners Day Care in Taylor to pick up her son. When her mother arrived, employees of the day-care center said the boy was already picked up, but nobody signed him out.

The boy's family searched for hours before finding him sitting under a pine tree in the parking lot of a nearby business.

Police are investigating the incident, but do not believe anything criminal was done.

The police department will hand the case over to the prosecutor's office for possible charges. The office of Child and Adult Licensing will decide if any disciplinary action toward the day-care center will be taken.

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Ex-prosecutor may have molested several children

He apparently was family friend of victims

PUBLISHED: May 25, 2006

By Chad Halcom
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A former Macomb County assistant prosecutor will likely return later this year to the court where he once helped to put many criminal defendants into prison -- this time as a defendant on felony charges that could put him in prison for life.

Steven Michael Waclawski, 52, of St. Clair Shores, remains in the DuPage County Jail in Illinois in lieu of \$200,000 bond this week, while officials in Michigan authorized 11 criminal charges against him including three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, a life felony.

Court officials in Michigan and Illinois explained it's a case that began with Waclawski allegedly traveling to Wheaton, Ill., outside Chicago intending to meet with a minor for sex in March. After his arrest, further investigation uncovered other evidence of a lengthy connection to sexually exploited children.

"There may be others we're unaware of, that's hard to say. But the victims in this case have been identified in the investigation," explained Nate Bailey of the Michigan Attorney General's Office, which obtained felony warrants charging Waclawski. "He appears to be a friend to the family of the victims."

Michigan officials raided Waclawski's home near the St. Clair Shores city golf course after his March arrest and seized his computer, along with a computer hard drive or work station at a Birmingham law office where he worked.

That led investigators to uncover hundreds of images of male child pornography, including roughly three dozen pictures that appeared to be taken by Waclawski himself -- some inside his home. Michigan State Police officers have since identified three children all somewhere between the ages of 10 and 15, Bailey said, though in court records released Wednesday their names are withheld.

In Illinois, he faces charges of intentional solicitation to a child to commit aggravated criminal sexual abuse, and attempted aggravated criminal sexual abuse.

An investigation by the Illinois attorney general's Internet Crimes Against Children task force accused Waclawski of flying to Chicago and then driving to Wheaton in an alleged

attempt to meet with a child he encountered on the Internet, who turned out to be an undercover police officer.

"He is only charged at this point. We obviously take these cases very seriously, but each one is considered separately on its evidence. We don't have a blanket policy on pursuing all offenders of the same type," said Paul Darrah of the DuPage County State Attorney's Office, which is prosecuting Waclawski for the Wheaton Internet sting.

Even though Illinois officials arrested Waclawski on March 18, officials in Michigan only brought charges against him recently because of the time it took to review all the information on his computers, then identify the children. Bailey said the children have cooperated with investigation and will likely be witnesses against the ex-prosecutor if the case goes to trial.

Waclawski worked as a trial attorney under former Macomb County Prosecutor Carl Marlinga from 1986-1990, according to records. During that tenure he was perhaps best known for the successful trial and conviction in 1989 of Michael Mihalik, Macomb County's first defendant to be convicted of second-degree murder for a drunken-driving offense. Second-degree murder prosecutions for drunken-driving deaths are much more commonplace at the prosecutor's office today; but at the time it was unprecedented and seen as a long shot to succeed.

"Nothing about him, to me, would have ever pointed to the terrible charges he's facing now," said Marlinga, Waclawski's former boss. "I recall he was very diligent, and had a good academic record. And he handled homicide cases, which you don't get to do as a prosecutor unless you've proven yourself and earned some trust."

Sometime after the Mihalik conviction, Marlinga said he learned Waclawski had given a closing statement in a trial that apparently impressed a member of the prestigious private law firm of Kitch, Drutchas, Wagner, DeNardis and Valitutti in downtown Detroit. He left the prosecutor's office after taking a job there in 1990, and since then Marlinga said he has fallen out of touch with Waclawski completely.

But Waclawski left Kitch Drutchas not long afterward, and in recent years he has worked for himself in private practice and as an associate at other firms. Most recently he'd been working at Birmingham-based Bruetsch & Associates; a phone message seeking comment from attorney Patrick Bruetsch was not returned Wednesday.

Michigan officials said this week that the Michigan case will be prosecuted in Macomb County at the 40th District Court in St. Clair Shores, after Waclawski concludes all legal proceedings in Illinois. Waclawski had a pretrial date at DuPage County Circuit Court earlier this week but that was rescheduled for June 5.

He could face a minimum of two years up to a maximum of five years in prison if convicted in Illinois. In Michigan, he faces three counts of first-degree CSC, two counts

of second-degree CSC, five counts of use of a computer in furtherance of a felony and one count of child sexually abusive activity.

If convicted on all charges, he could face a maximum of life in prison.

MACOMB COUNTY

Lawyer facing child sex charges

Former Macomb County assistant prosecutor could get life in prison

May 25, 2006

BY DAN CORTEZ
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Birmingham lawyer Steven M. Waclawski, 52, of St. Clair Shores is being held in Illinois on \$200,000 bond.

A former assistant prosecutor for Macomb County faces criminal sexual conduct charges after going to Illinois to allegedly have sex with someone he thought was a minor, prosecutors say.

Steven M. Waclawski, 52, of St. Clair Shores is being held in Illinois on \$200,000 bond on one count of soliciting, three counts of first degree and two counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct. He also faces five counts of using a computer to produce sexually abusive child material. If convicted, he could be sentenced to life in prison.

Waclawski flew to Chicago and drove to Wheaton, Ill., on March 18 to meet a boy he thought he was chatting with online. Instead, he was talking to a member of the Illinois Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, and he was arrested when he arrived in Wheaton.

On March 20, following his arrest in Illinois, the Michigan Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force raided his home, where investigators found hundreds of pornographic images of young boys.

Several of the pictures appear to show Waclawski engaged in sexual activity with underage boys at his home, said Nate Bailey, a spokesman for Attorney General Mike Cox.

Bailey said Wednesday that "part of what came out of the Illinois investigation led us to his home."

The task force also seized computers from Waclawski's home. Bailey said he is suspected of having at least one sexual encounter in Michigan with an underage boy.

Waclawski was an assistant prosecutor from March 1986 to July 1990 before working as a lawyer in Birmingham. He will remain in Illinois while facing charges there before returning to St. Clair Shores to be arraigned on the criminal sexual conduct charges.

There is no arraignment date yet.

Contact DAN CORTEZ at 586-469-1827 or dcortez@freepress.com.

Ottawa or Texas, who gets couple?

Thursday, May 25, 2006

By John Tunison
The Grand Rapids Press

HOLLAND -- The Ottawa County Sheriff's Department today is investigating why a Holland couple, accused of killing their infant daughter in Texas, was released to Texas authorities this week without an extradition hearing.

The hearing, required when a defendant is fighting removal to another state, was supposed to be held next week.

"We take these things very, very seriously," Undersheriff Greg Steigenga said.

The apparent mix-up is the latest twist in a case beset by conflicting evidence over the child's death. The security vehicle now faces the spectre of traveling 1,300 miles to San Marcos, Texas, only to be sent back with the couple.

The vehicle had not reached the Texas jail as of this morning.

Steigenga said the couple was moved Tuesday after governors in Michigan and Texas signed warrants, and the Ottawa County Prosecutor's Office determined they were no longer needed in Michigan.

Steigenga said he wanted to know why an extradition officer was apparently unaware of the upcoming extradition hearing, set for Wednesday.

A lawyer for Cipriano Gonzales IV and his wife, Esther, said he learned Wednesday the couple was released from the Ottawa County Jail to a security transport company a day earlier.

"This caught me completely unaware," Holland attorney John Moritz said.

Texas authorities confirmed a transport vehicle was sent to retrieve the couple at the request of the Ottawa County Jail.

Sgt. Penny Dunn of the San Marcos Police Department, the agency that investigated the March 11 death of 2-month-old Cynthea, said Gov. Jennifer Granholm's office authorized the pickup. She said a governor's office notice indicated the Gonzaleses no longer had the option of fighting extradition.

But Moritz, who planned to meet with Holland District Judge Brad Knoll today on the issue, said the couple had not agreed to extradition. He questioned anyone's ability to transport them out of Michigan without a court hearing.

"That is what the Uniform Extradition Act provides for," he said. "I do know there is a provision that if they were wrongly removed, whatever office turned them over could be criminally charged."

The Gonzaleses are accused of causing head trauma to Cynthea eight days after they moved to San Marcos from the Holland area. They were arrested March 18 in Holland after returning here to bury Cynthea.

Since their arrest, the case has been fraught with controversy over two medical examiner reports that reached conflicting conclusions. An examiner with Travis County, Texas, ruled the cause of death as undetermined, despite a skull fracture, two bruises under the scalp and evidence of past rib fractures.

Police said another examination four days later in Tarrant County found head trauma caused the death, but that examiner earlier this month told the San Marcos Daily Record he had made no final ruling. Dunn said Wednesday slides of brain material have been sent to the Tarrant County examiner so he can issue that ruling.

The transfer angered Esther Gonzales' mother, Mary Loreda.

"I didn't know they could just take them like that without a hearing," she said.

Upon a conviction for capital murder, the couple could face the death penalty in Texas if the prosecutor chooses to pursue it.

Send e-mail to the author: jtunison@grpress.com

Thursday, May 25, 2006

The Detroit News

Special Letter

Don't leave children unattended in vehicles

The May 9th article "Mother to be charged after infant left in car" reminds us of the importance of never leaving a child alone in a car. Fortunately, the five-month old girl was unharmed, but the sad reality is that tragedies can happen in less than one minute.

As founders of Kids in Cars (www.kidsincars.org), we are strong advocates of safety measures to keep kids safe in and around cars. The one thing that every parent and caregiver can do starting immediately is to never, not even for a single minute, leave children unattended in and around motor vehicles.

The temperature inside a motor vehicle can reach deadly levels within minutes, yet each year a significant number of children are left unattended in vehicles. This story displays just one of the many dangers of leaving children alone in cars.

In addition to hypothermia and heat exhaustion, other dangers include choking, trunk entrapment and abduction.

With the hot summer months rapidly approaching, please help keep our children safe. Our message bears repeating: Do not leave children alone in or around vehicles. Not even for a minute.

Terrill Struttman

Michele Struttman

Directors

Kids In Cars

Washington, Mo.

WAYNE COUNTY

County may ease mental health shift

May 25, 2006

BY ZACHARY GORCHOW
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A proposed independent authority that would take over operations for mental health services in Wayne County from government would retain ties to the county for its first year, with the authority getting full autonomy afterward.

The plan, unveiled Wednesday by county commissioners, is raising some concerns from the administration of County Executive Robert Ficano.

Years of criticism of the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency's operations, coupled with the threat of state intervention, have prompted county officials to move toward ceding direct control of the agency.

The proposal, which could go to the commission for approval as early as June 15, lets current county employees of the agency keep their jobs until Sept. 1, 2007; it creates a transition team of Detroit and county officials to aid the changeover, and requires the use of county services, such as technology, for one year.

If the plan goes through, the more than \$500 million in Medicaid grants for mental health from the state and federal governments would go directly to the authority instead of first going to the county, which critics say has diverted millions of dollars to other purposes. Supporters say an authority also would speed changes to help the 40,000 patients the agency sees annually, and allow more money to be spent on services instead of bureaucracy.

"I think we're all on the same page that this is about consumers and protecting employees and creating as little disruption as possible," said Commissioner Philip Cavanagh, D-Redford Township, who is heading a task force on the issue and assembled the proposal. Edith Killins, director of the county's Department of Health and Human Services, rated the plan a 50 on a scale of 1 to 100.

Killins said she and other administration staff only received copies of the proposal a few minutes prior to a Wednesday task force meeting.

So far, Killins said she likes the proposal's ethics language, but wants to see more safeguards for the county.

State Sen. Bev Hammerstrom, a Temperance Republican who has introduced legislation to shift control of mental health services to an independent authority, said she's encouraged to see the county moving forward.

Hammerstrom said there are a few parts of the proposal that conflict with the state Mental Health Code, but overall she has no qualms with the measure and supports a yearlong transition.

Hammerstrom said the county needs to move soon because the Legislature is targeting June 15 as the date to wrap up work on the state budget and adjourn for the summer.

Contact ZACHARY GORCHOW at 313-223-4536.

KEY CHANGES

- Here are some of the major changes that would take place in mental health governance under a plan that would shift control of services from Wayne County to an independent authority:
 - After Sept. 1, 2007, the authority can replace existing staff.
 - Authority's executive director would hire top staff, not the county executive; undecided is whether the executive director would get that power immediately or after one year of the authority taking effect.
 - County mental health workers would become employees of the authority.
 - Authority can make purchases and agree to contracts without county approval.
 - County's allocation of mental health funds would be frozen at \$17.7 million annually.

DETROIT

Gleaners aims to speed up food aid

Web to help boost efficiency, meet growing demand

May 25, 2006

BY SHABINA S. KHATRI
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Colleen Woznick realized she'd need help for her family in February when her husband lost his job at a cement company.

She's not alone.

Woznick, a 42-year-old Hamburg Township resident who lives in a household with eight kids, joined a growing number of emergency aid recipients when she contacted Gleaners Community Food Bank in Detroit for food assistance.

With residents facing bigger expenses, more layoffs and shrinking incomes, Michigan has seen a 30% jump in emergency food aid usage over the past four years -- from 750,000 people in 2001 to one million in 2005.

"It's not like we're poor or anything," said Woznick. "But people that have money need help, too."

Last year, more than 40% of the people who received food pantry assistance in the state were employed and about 20% had college-level schooling, according to a survey done in part by the Food Bank Council of Michigan that involved nearly 1,400 aid agencies.

To help local food distributors meet the growing needs among the state's working poor and middle-class families, Gleaners unveiled a plan Wednesday aimed at helping groups become more efficient in delivering services and fighting hunger.

The strategies -- which include modernizing pantries, centralizing inventory and using the Internet to raise donations -- could go a long way in alleviating the worsening hunger crisis in Michigan, said Gerry Brisson, vice president of development for Gleaners and former director of Capuchin Soup Kitchens in Detroit.

They even recognize the ubiquity of the World Wide Web by including a site that allows a person to find a pantry by typing in their ZIP code.

"We have more people using the emergency food system than ever," said Jane Marshall, executive director of the Food Bank Council of Michigan, adding that one in 10 people in the state are expected to seek food assistance this year.

"People are making really difficult decisions about how to spend their limited income because they just don't have enough money. It's the economics of living in Michigan -- the increasing expense of medication, cost of gas and utilities and more job loss in our state than ever" before.

Gleaners, which works with 250 pantries in southeast Michigan, distributes 25 million pounds of food annually, but estimates that groups have capacity, much of it untapped, to dole out 40 million pounds.

Brisson said it's not just about obtaining the food, but distributing it quickly and efficiently.

Gleaners' push, which is being funded by grants from AT&T and Charter One, allows pantries from across the state and the United States to swap industry information by computer, including tips on getting started, managing perishable goods and establishing an Internet presence.

Another part of the strategy would push groups to create pantries where recipients select their own food in a convenience-store setting.

The client-choice pantry model, which is being tested in Livingston County, helps prevent food waste by ensuring that people get food that they will actually eat, said Darlene Paulauski, Gleaners' director of corporate and foundation relations. Gleaners hopes to open such a pantry in Detroit within the year.

Paulauski added that the new model also affords more dignity to users, a feature that Woznick sees as a blessing.

"It works great," said Woznick. "You go down the aisles with your shopping carts just like you're at a grocery store. You don't feel like" you're less than others.

Contact SHABINA S. KHATRI at 586-469-8087 or skhatri@freepress.com.

GLEANERS' NEW TOOLS FOR FOOD CHAIN

- **Pantrynet.org:** This Web site links to a national network of food-assistance resources to help agencies and people looking for help. A Beta version of the site has been operational for one year and it includes a discussion group, recipes and a function that allows people to find pantries near their homes.
- **Glinkos:** These are computer workstations that pantry leaders can use to place orders, receive tutorials and conduct routine business such as printing materials. One is set up at Gleaners' Detroit warehouse at 2131 Beaufait, and more stations are planned.
- **Client-choice pantries:** An alternate to packed grocery parcels, these facilities will allow recipients to shop for food in convenience store settings, reducing food waste. Gleaners says it plans to build a model pantry in Detroit within the year.
- **eCupboard.org:** This is a virtual food drive that allows donors to designate funds to specific agencies. It's already up and running.

Gov., husband mentor children

Granholt employees engage in Big Brothers Big Sisters; Mulhern creates similar program

By ANDREA BYL

The State News

Changing society one youth at a time is Gov. Jennifer Granholm's philosophy when it comes to youth mentorship — a philosophy her staff has also adopted.

Grand River Elementary Magnet School in Lansing benefits directly from Granholm's office since 25 of her employees are involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Lansing mentor program at the school.

The agency is a youth mentor service that matches a child with an adult in order for him or her to spend time with a positive role model.

Joni Burch, case manager at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Greater Lansing, has worked with Granholm and her staff.

"Her 'little sister' absolutely loves hanging out with her; they do a lot of art projects together," Burch said and added that Granholm's entire family is involved with the program.

"She adores her," said Lansing resident Cynthia Mares, the mother of the 10-year-old child Granholm mentors, whose name is also Cynthia. "She thinks it's hilarious when they go places and people recognize her," she said.

Granholt, with her husband Daniel Mulhern, began pushing for a mentorship program in Michigan during her time as attorney general, said Joan Bowman, special project manager for Mulhern.



JOLIE MYERS - The State News

Kindergartner Mya Anderson-Jones swings from playground equipment as Alisha Bennett, a volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, watches Wednesday at Grand River Elementary, 1107 E. Grand River Ave. in Lansing. Bennett has been volunteering at the school since September.

After Granholm was elected governor, Mulhern decided to take the initiative to develop the mentor program, Bowman said.

He started Mentor Michigan and currently serves as the chairman.

"If we were going to encourage people to mentor, we have to start with ourselves," said Bowman, who also coordinates the Lunch Buddies program, also through Big Brothers Big Sisters, for the Granholm administration.

For the Lunch Buddies program, an adult mentor goes to a school once a week to eat lunch with a child he or she mentors.

"I think I have gotten more out of it than he has," Bowman said of the boy she mentors.

Lindsay Huddleston, a law clerk in the office of legal council to Granholm, got involved in mentoring through the Lunch Buddies program.

"Like me, many people would think that their schedule would not permit it, but you would be surprised that once you make the connection with the young person, you would do any-and-everything to stay committed to them," he said.

Huddleston said the leadership of Granholm, and especially Mulhern, influenced him.

Huddleston has as many as five boys seek him out each week when he comes to eat lunch.

"The young men were available, and they really gravitated to me. I think it was my firm love — love with a little discipline," Huddleston said. "It's been really enriching."

In the Greater Lansing area, 526 people are involved in the program, about 150 of which are MSU students, according to Big Brothers Big Sisters records.

Yet, a pressing need still exists for adults in the area to get involved, especially men, Bowman said.

For more information on the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, or to become a volunteer mentor, visit <http://www.bigimpactmidmi.com>.

Huge bill for public retirees hits soon

USA Today
5/18/06

Medical benefit cost could top \$1 trillion

By Dennis Cauchon
USA TODAY

Taxpayers will soon get a surprise bill that could exceed \$1 trillion for the cost of paying future medical benefits for state and local workers who retire.

Retiree medical costs are the biggest long-term challenge that state and local governments face. By comparison, state and local pensions have an unfunded liability of about \$500 billion.

State and local governments have set aside \$2.5 trillion to help pay pension benefits for 19 million civil servants and 7 million retirees. But they have set aside almost nothing to pay for retiree medical benefits.

"Taxpayers will revolt when they realize the enormous cost of this," Minnesota State Auditor Pat Anderson says. She says the financial burdens on local governments will be so great they will put pressure on the federal government to nationalize health care, which she opposes.

New accounting rules require that governments, starting next year, put a price tag on the value of medical benefits promised to civil servants when they retire. New York City's liability, for example, approaches \$50 billion. The city's total budget last year was \$53 billion.

"It's no exaggeration to say that elected officials are shocked, absolutely shocked, by the size of these liabilities," says Donald Rueckert Jr., senior vice president and actuary at Aon Consulting, an insurance broker.

The federal government also has a \$2.3 trillion unfunded liability for medical and disability benefits promised to civil servants and military personnel who retire. The costs are not the nation's biggest financial problem. Medicare has a \$33.4 trillion unfunded liability. Social Security has a \$4.6 trillion shortfall.

The impact on taxpayers of retiree medical care will vary widely. Minneapolis has no liability because it doesn't offer retiree medical benefits. Duluth, Minn., has a burden equal to about \$8,000 per household for the free lifetime medical benefits the city promised workers and their families.

The new accounting rules don't require governments to do anything about retiree costs. But governments will come under pressure from lenders and others to act. "If this problem is ignored, that will be a negative factor when we determine credit ratings," says Standard & Poor's credit analyst Parry Young.

Corporations implemented a similar accounting rule in 1993. The result was a drastic reduction in the number of companies offering medical benefits to retirees.

Governments have less freedom to cut retiree health care because most benefits were negotiated in union contracts. Public employee unions plan to fight attempts to reduce retiree medical benefits.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg plans to set \$1 billion aside this year for retiree benefits.

Examples of liabilities

(in billions of dollars)

Calif.	\$40-70
Mich.	\$30
N.J.	\$20
Md.	\$20
New York City	\$50
L.A. school district	\$10
Detroit	\$7

Source: Governmental Research Association Reporter

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Medical examiner grilled in Unger case

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

BEULAH -- Oakland County Medical Examiner Ljubisa Dragovic has testified in hundreds of cases over the past two decades, but perhaps none was more intense than an appearance Wednesday in the trial of a Huntington Woods man charged with killing his wife.

Mark Unger, 45, of Huntington Woods is on trial on first-degree murder charges in the Oct. 25, 2003, death of Florence Unger, 37, who was found floating facedown in Lower Herring Lake at the Inn of Watervale resort.

After nearly five hours of cross-examination in a packed courtroom hanging on his every word, Dragovic, the prosecution's star witness, wearily climbed into his car for a five-hour drive home.

Dragovic wryly noted how his big day -- the third time he has made the trip to testify this month in the Unger trial -- began at 5 a.m. when his wife packed him a peanut butter sandwich and Thermos of espresso for the drive north.

He said he was glad to testify but disappointed at some of the questions put to him by defense attorney Thomas McGuire.

"I was hoping we would be discussing more substantive issues, but he (McGuire) seemed more interested in other things, like how many floors there are in the courthouse," said Dragovic, after McGuire peppered him with questions about perceived pro-prosecution court appearances, his expertise, and how many floors there are in the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice in Detroit.

The intense, often-heated exchange appeared to be an effort to impeach Dragovic's testimony in the trial, which began April 26. Or as assistant prosecuting attorney John Skrzynski complained to Benzie Circuit Judge James Batzer: "To dirty him (Dragovic) up before the jury."

But despite McGuire's repeated efforts, Dragovic stuck to his opinion Florence Unger died of drowning because she was unconscious and couldn't pull herself from the shallow water.

In other testimony, Tom Kelly, a Benzie County commissioner and retired Benzie County Sheriff's deputy, told the jury how he, while a deputy, talked with Unger at Watervale on the morning his wife's body was found.

"I asked him if he was the last person to see her alive, and he said 'I guess so.' And at that point, I told him if that was the case I was going to read him his (Miranda) rights."

Kelly also said that in 33 years of police work, "I have never seen anything so disingenuous" as Unger's behavior, citing evasiveness and crying without tears

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or e-mail mmartindale@detnews.com.

05/25/2006

Traverse City Record Eagle

Defense challenges medical examiner

BEULAH — Defense attorneys Wednesday tried to undermine the credibility of a medical examiner who agrees with prosecutors that a suburban Detroit man drowned his wife at a northern Michigan resort.

Oakland County Medical Examiner Ljubisa Dragovic is a crucial witness against Mark Unger, who is charged with first-degree murder in the death of Florence Unger. The 37-year-old Huntington Woods woman was found floating at the shallow edge of Lower Herring Lake on Oct. 25, 2003.

Dragovic testified last week in Benzie County Circuit Court that Florence Unger's injuries suggested she was punched or kicked before tumbling over a boathouse deck railing to a concrete surface 12 feet below, then was dragged several feet and placed face-down in the water, where she drowned.

Mark Unger, 45, has pleaded not guilty and contends Florence Unger died accidentally. She had filed for divorce but accompanied her husband and sons on a weekend trip to a the Michigan resort, where she died.